

Testimony In support of S.B. No. 1055: An Act Concerning Gifted and Talented Students

A Gifted and Talented boy's journey from a district without a designated TAG program to a Hartford Magnet School that recognized his need to be challenged and advanced, then took him to a whole new level.

When your child comes home from school each day in elementary school and you ask him "How was your day?" a parent would like to hear something interesting coming from a son who they know to be exceptionally bright. But instead all that we learned was it was just "ok". His teacher's comments on report cards from kindergarten to 5th grade were always the same. "Our son is bright and brings a wealth of information to the classroom discussion, but he could do better, he is slow to get motivated and likes to daydream, or is easily distracted by an interesting book." When he was designated by the Winchester Public School district as a Talented and Gifted student and I knew they did not have a program to support his needs, because the state does not mandate or fund one. Parent education about what his learning needs should have been provided by the district or an outside agency. As educated parents we sought out the educational opportunities we felt he needed and navigated the public educational system in this state on our own.

For his 6th grade year we applied for a seat at the Environmental Sciences Magnet School at Mary Hooker in Hartford. Even though we agonized about the transportation aspect of over an hour bus ride each way, we were looking for a school that specialized in a science based curriculum to support his interests. Winchester Schools at that time did not teach science as a core topic, it was only taught if a teacher felt they had time for it.

What started as a curriculum based move to a magnet education came to be an exceptional experience for him in Talented and Gifted advanced learning. The sixth grade team at ESM learned early in his MAP assessments that our son was scoring advanced and needed to be challenged in math, literacy and science. They devised a curriculum for him even though they did not have the funding available for a structured TAG program. For a classroom teacher to take the time to assign various levels of work for their students who can progress at a faster rate than the rest of the classroom, has made all the difference in his self-esteem. What I now know is called "cluster grouping" by the CAG Association is being implemented at ESM in all grade levels after they have educated their staff to recognize and address the needs of their advanced students. This school year 2014-15, ESM at Mary Hooker has begun a more structured Talented and Gifted program without state funding or mandates.

My son has been taking his math courses online with the Virtual High School program provided by Hartford Public Schools, he is in 8th grade and is studying Geometry this year. Because of the advanced education he has received in science at ESM he is competing for the second year in the CT State Science and Engineering Fair this week at Quinnipiac University. This would not have been possible if he was in a school district without educated staff trained to work with TAG children.

What I know now was happening in his elementary years was he was bored, and tuned out the lessons that was being repeated again and again for the majority of the class. The CT State Department of Education is doing a great disservice to a **vital segment of their population of children** who need to be

challenged beyond the basic education provided in our state schools. Talented and Gifted students fall within the range of Special Education, but they do not have the mandated funding that children who are below basic receive. Our brightest children, who will be the leaders and progressive thinkers of tomorrow, are being educated below their capabilities. I know who these children are in my hometown of Winchester, and I hear from them how bored they are, and what little if anything, is being done to enrich their learning needs. I want all TAG children in the state of CT to have the opportunity to advance at their own pace like my son has been able to do at ESM in Hartford.

I support S.B. No. 1055 as a starting point to address the needs of Talented and Gifted children across that State of Connecticut.

With great concern for our brightest children,

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